

# Review

1930  
NUMERO DI  
GENNAIO

**DOMUS**  
L'ARTE NELLA CASA

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## BOOK

# Domus 1928-1999

A mammoth anthology of the quintessential Italian architecture and design magazine is proof that everything's been done before, says **Kieran Long**

An icon book review is usually around 600 words, if the editors are kind. But there can't have been many that have had to cover quite as much yardage as this one. Two weeks ago, two large boxes arrived at my front door containing 12 volumes – 7,000 pages in total – of the greatest hits of Domus, the Italian architecture and design magazine sine qua non. Even The Beatles managed to fit their number ones onto a single CD. I must confess that I haven't read it all.

But even if there is something titanically arrogant on the part of Editoriale Domus (and Benedikt Taschen, who underwrote the enterprise), this anthology is one of the most valuable and enjoyable things you could have on your bookshelf.

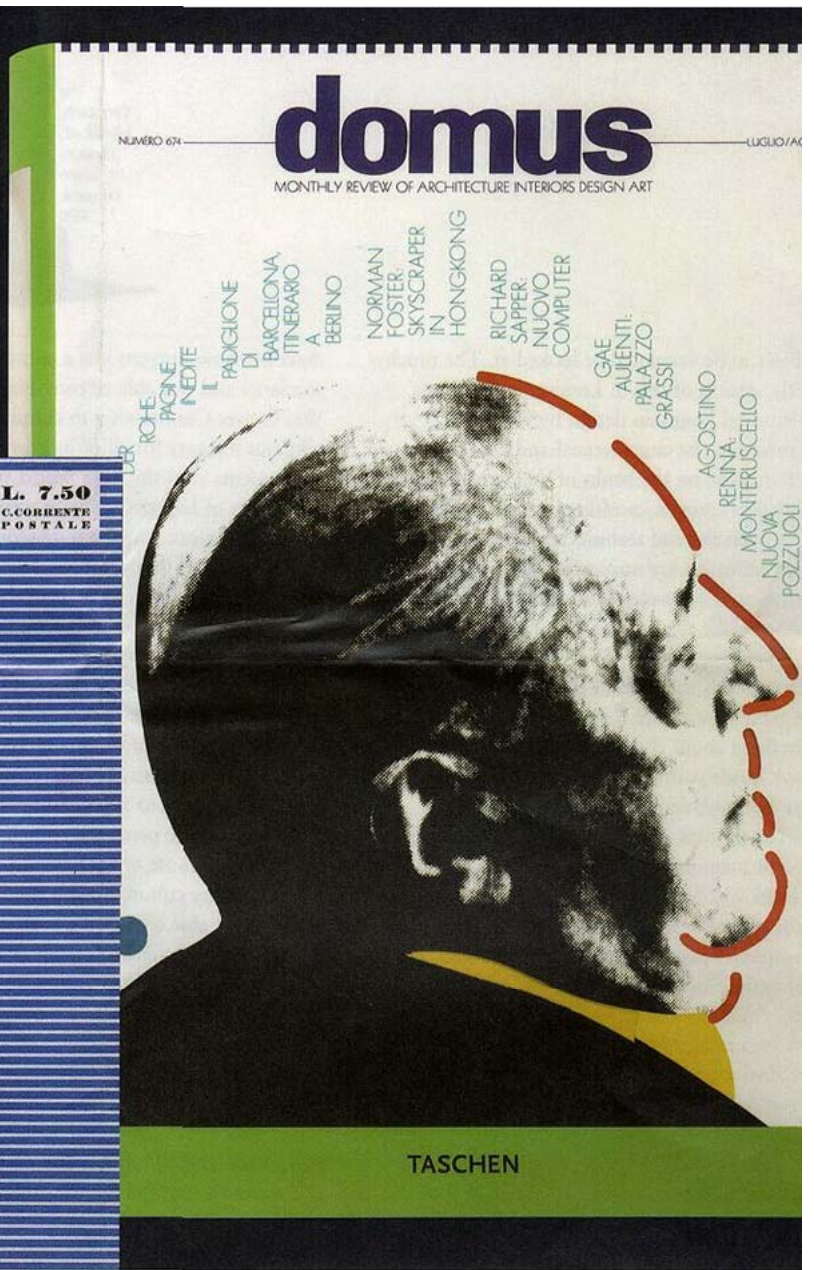
Domus was founded in 1928, but its real identity was formed a year later, when the then 23-year old Gianni Mazocchi took over as publisher and formed a partnership with the editor, one

Gio Ponti, already then a notable designer and architect in Milan.

Originally conceived as a lifestyle magazine (with features on gardening and how to set the table for an elegant Christmas dinner), it went on to concentrate on Ponti's core interests: architecture, design (mainly industrially produced objects) and fine art. This collection brings together what appears to be a good mix of canonical and obscure work. A nice touch is the decision to

include selected pages of advertising amongst the editorial. The elegance of Pinin Farina's 1939 advertisement for the Alfa Romeo 8C 2900 is here, but the 1980s social documents of semi-naked models next to rolls of carpet are consigned to different history books.

Ponti's idea was to make a magazine concerned with the way people live, and the early issues feature houses prominently. His first editorial still makes perceptive



TASCHEN





and fascinating reading. "The Italian house is not the insulated and furnished refuge that protects inhabitants against the rigours of climate typical of homes north of the Alps." It is a machine for living, he explains, but with the comfortable trappings of art and furniture as well as "nymphaea and vistas", courtyards, loggias and terraces.

In the following pages are houses in Italy by Ernesto Rogers, furniture by Piero Bottoni, and many others. The foreign reference points early on are mainly German (particularly Max Taut and Mies) and American, with Le Corbusier the significant exception. Domus was the ultimate chronicle of modernism.

The magazine has a compulsory redesign every five years, and this is a visual treat. But it is particularly striking in the early volumes of this collection how populated the photographs are, and not just with people, but objects – set dinner tables, offices with cradle telephones, typewriters and ashtrays.

There is no way to sum up what is here. Simply everything. The pleasure is to turn just 20 pages and see, for example, a Craig Ellwood Case Study House, a Buckminster Fuller Dome, and some Ettore Sottsass Jr crockery so beautiful that you wonder why anyone bothered designing more

plates. A single-page news story on the Eames' lounge for Herman Miller (1956) should give hope to all those designers out there who think icon has not given enough space to their work. There is only one negative effect of these books – they are evidence that everything has been done before.

It is way beyond my historical knowledge and the remit of this review to assess the contribution of Domus to Western culture. My first encounters with it were relatively recent, about ten years ago, but it is difficult to credit the editors' (Charlotte and Peter Fiell) opening statement about it retaining much of an interest in lifestyle. The final volumes are dominated by coverage of the big public buildings that now constitute the place of significant experimentation for major contemporary architects. The final project featured is, though, a dwelling – Preston Scott Cohen's Torus House, completed in New York in 1999. Whether the eight pages of coverage it received will see it outstrip the Eames lounge in popularity by eight to one in future years remains to be seen.

**Domus 1928-1999**  
(12 volumes), edited by  
**Charlotte and Peter Fiell**, is  
published by **Taschen**, £350  
[www.taschen.com](http://www.taschen.com)